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AUTHOR Martorella, Peter H.
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ABSTRACT

The current malaise in social science education research is the result of a stalemate between social studies educators and their research activities at the university level: (1) The social studies educator is not held accountable for research as for teaching courses or supervising student teachers. (2) "Research" is so loosely defined that one can allege research without paying the costs in time. (3) The profession fails to define its inquiry and expertise parameters. (4) Applied research is emphasized to the detriment of basic research. (5) The methodological tools and data of other disciplines are not exploited. (6) The existing external funding matrices do not significantly reward research-oriented social studies educators. Criticizing existent research, encouraging communities of interest and publication forums, and recognizing outstanding achievements will not suffice to change this situation. Instead, these "environmental" problems must be remedied, for instance, through political action strategies to gain release time, accountability procedures, and rewards for research; national research fellowships for joint research among pre- and postdoctoral fellows; the definition of expertise parameters in a national conference; and the development of a methodology and instrumentation monograph, as well as a basic research monograph. (Author/JH)

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Environmental Impediments to Effective Research: Some Presumptions in Search of Validation

Peter H. Martorella

Temple University
Philadelphia, Pa.

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> Practitioners and professors of social studies education seem to have little commitment to research...(Shaver and Larkins)

This paper is analogous to an old-fashioned pre- Deep Throat burlesque show; it is meant to tease and arouse without really delivering the hoped-for climax. Those who have frequented annual gatherings of this sort may recall that at some point there occurs the obligatory Research Grousing Ritual (the RGR). Over the years, this ritual has become highly stylized; it involves a certain amount of head-shaking, grimaces, prescribed incantations, and possibly even a few embarrassing hand gestures -- all directed at the deplorable state of research on the teaching of social studies.

Different colleges and universities, of course, have their own special variations of the ritual, and some of these are considered to be more authoritative than others. Like all rituals, the RGR provides a certain amount of enrichment, stability and continuity with the past, and, consequently, is perpetuated and taught to the younger members of the group. Frequently, it even is practiced on one's own campus in anticipation of the annual conference performance.

Periodically, some incidental spin-offs of the RGR result in serious concrete attempts to deal with the actual malaise that gave rise to the ritual. The Social Education "Research Supplement" (though atrophied) is a case in point. The rise of CUFA and the Special Interest Group: Research in Social Studies Education of AERA are still others.

To the same point, two Handbook chapters, each in different ways, have served to diagnose our profession's ills and urge us to remedial action. Both also serve to remind us that we have not gotten very far along on whatever it was that we were about.

As constructive as all these thrusts may be, their cumulative effect does not appear to be much more significant than the RGR. Shaver and Larkins sum up our research heritage in an embarrassing no-nonsense paragraph.

> In looking over the writings about teaching social studies, one is struck by the lack of a body of systematic, empirically based knowledge. The research, frequently involving surveys of "expert" opinion, has not been significant in terms of affecting classroom practice, building a body of knowledge upon which decisions about classroom practice could be made or laying a foundation for further research. (Shaver and Larkins, 1973, p. 1244)

Consider their summary, too, against the backdrop of Chapin's investigation of dissertations in social studies education for the period 1969-1973. She reported that the most popular topic for dissertations was "doing research on teachers and teacher education." (Chapin, 1973, P. 5) She notes further that fewer than 60 dissertations were on these topics!

How then are we to account for the condition of research on the teaching of social studies? Why has our profession produced so little research that is of use to anyone; why is it so uneven in quality and noncumulative; and why does the pattern seem to continue? If an increasing number of dissertation studies, new forums for researchers to share their findings, and periodic scholarly analyses of the state

of the art have not had a significant impact on our profession's research, wherein lies the remedy?

My hunch is that all of the aforementioned attempted remedies are necessary but insufficient approaches to the problem, and that unless we move beyond them, the third Handbook chapter will be a parody of the old doctor-patient joke: "Remember the problem you had 10 years ago? Well you've got it again!" As with all problems that bear easy panaceas, the answers here would seem to lie in a careful analysis of the environment that breeds and sustains the problem. My contention is that we need to lay bare candidly those environmental factors that interact with and shape the character of our profession's research. Minimally, this requires an examination of how social studies educators interact with research at the college and university level, the locus of most research consumption and generation. This type of analysis is highly presumptuous business at best, and I offer my reflections only in the spirit of bringing the issue more visibility.

Some Presumptions About Research Environments

What follows is a diverse array of presumptions touching upon a number of conditions that I perceive as impeding the growth of effective research on the teaching of social studies. Not all of them of course, are intended to apply to all situations. Where the reader disagrees, he or she is challenged to offer an alternative presumption to advance the dialog.

Presumption 1: "Researcher" is not an ascribed role for social studies educators. It is assumed that one will "do research" in some fashion, but one is not held accountable in the same way as for teaching courses or supervising student teachers. In most cases, research per se probably is neither a formal requirement for maintaining employment nor for securing tenure.

It may be argued that the assumption of "research" is implicit in the loose contractual arrangement that binds us and our institutions, and is reflected in the existent "rewards system." I would suggest that given the nature of what most of us end up spending most of our instructional time on -- teaching methods and curriculum and social science courses and supervising teachers -- success intra- and extra-institutionally has little relationship to our research productivity. To put the matter quite crassly, a variety of other pay-off matrices such as textbook writing, consulting, speeches, and the like can suffice for and even supercede research. Careful and significant research is laborious, usually requires learning some new skill, is fraught with dozens of headaches that never appear in the final report, often is expensive, and always is time consuming. It also is a small space on a vita. There are many intellectual rewards, including the excitement and satisfaction of research, that drew us all to the colleges and universities, but the prudent young academic is likely to weigh carefully the cost/benefit ratio associated with research.

Presumption 2: "Research" can mean anything you want it to. This presumption is closely related to the first in that it becomes easy to allege research without really paying the costs, most notably time. Most of us, whether the role is ascribed or not, probably like to be perceived as being engaged in "research." The looseness with which social studies educators seem to use the term may help to enhance our self concepts, but does little to redress the problem in question. To the extent that we fob off any old project, whatever its merits, as "research," we become more of the problem than of the solution.

Research, however defined, involves a systematic attempt to provide well-grounded answers to questions eventuating in some conclusion or generalization. Above all, to qualify as research, a study should be replicable and transmittable, as Tuckman reminds us.

> Thus, individuals other than the researcher himself may use the results of a study, and one researcher may build upon the research results of another. Moreover, the process and procedures are themselves transmittable, enabling others to replicate them and assess their validity. (Tuckman, 1972, p. 12)

Presumption 3: The profession has failed to define its inquiry and expertise parameters. A flexible and organic profession will expand its parameters as they are outgrown; one that has no boundaries is easily diffused and rendered chaotic. Shaver and Larkins level a similar charge under the rubrics of "What Is Social Studies?" and "What Research Is Worth Doing?"

> Research studies on teaching social studies -- primarily the theses of graduate students because practitioners and professors of social studies education seem to have little commitment to research -- tend to lack a clear conception of what is meant by "social studies education."
> .....
>
> Examination of the philosophical and empirical assumptions of various approaches to social studies education would, then, help alleviate a major problem with the research on teaching social studies -- the failure to deal with questions that have intellectual significance or are closely related to pressing human needs. (1973, p. 1245).

I would put the matter more broadly in the form of two questions: "In what ways does the teaching of social studies differ from that of teaching in general?" and "In what ways does social studies education differ from education in general?" I would submit that operational answers to these questions will move us considerably further along in generating effective research. While I have discussed this point elsewhere (Martorella, 1974), the relevant issue is that researchers of necessity inherit all of the conceptual problems that plague our field in general.

Presumption 4: Applied research has been emphasized to the detriment of basic research. At best, the social studies research community has adopted a body of basic research that lacks both integration and depth. While the ultimate goal of any profession that deals with applied arts must be the creation of a large body of applied research, there must be a corresponding thrust providing the necessary theory and model generation from which applied research may

grow. Where some basic variables can be identified that constitute the nucleus of a problem, there is the potential for generating results with a high level of generalizability.

It should be acknowledged that this issue intersects with that raised in the first presumption in that basic research produces low visibility results within the professional community, while consuming considerable resources. Furthermore, such activities run the risk of being branded as "irrelevant" -- the professional kiss of death -- by practitioners.

Presumption 5: The methodological tools and data of other disciplines have not been adequately exploited by social studies researchers. Certainly the more recent doctoral dissertations are less susceptible to this criticism, but the profession as a whole seems to have ignored many of the potentially useful research tools that particularly sociology, anthropology and psychology have developed. Apart from ethnographic analysis urged by Shaver and Larkins, a variety of naturalistic procedures and measurement instruments have been developed that are highly relevant to our research concerns. Q-sort methodology, semantic differentials, Piagetian-type interviews, and Delphi techniques are just a few varied cases in point. Perhaps as social studies researchers become increasingly more interested in affect-related issues, they will use such tools to a greater extent, as well as begin to build upon and modify them.

Presumption 6: The existing external funding matrices do not significantly reward research-oriented social studies educators.

As the first presumption suggested in part research activity is not significantly rewarded within or outside of one's institution. Furthermore, I submit there are few external rewards available to social studies researchers. This allegation is difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate, but a variety of inferential data exist. "Project Social Studies," whose funding intracacies are beyond the scope of this paper, is a vintage case in point. Whatever its final merits are adjudged to be, with few exceptions, it did little to further the state of social studies research. A perusal of the priority programs of the National Science Foundation, a mainstay of funding support for many social studies educators, should further reinforce my contention.

If Presumptions Were Conclusions

This is the audience-participation part of the program. If you have bought the premise up to now, what alternative future actions seem appropriate? Some sketchy scenarios of my own that can be fleshed out in our discussions are as follows.

1. Political Action Strategies. Within their departments, researchers need to organize and devise strategies for gaining access to research support. These would involve explicit policies relating to released time, accountability procedures and rewards for results.

2. National Research Fellowships. One suggested model would be a foundation or federally supported program combining pre- and post-doctoral fellows and support services for a year of joint research

activities. The only stipulation would be that all parties commit themselves to various joint research projects.

3. Jointly Sponsered National Conference. This could be a conference jointly sponsored by NCSS, CUFA, and the Special Interest Group: Research in Social Studies Education -- AERA devoted to defining the inquiry and expertise parameters of the profession, as discussed in Presumption 3.

4. Development of a Methodology and Instrumentation Monograph. Building upon the Shaver and Larkins suggestions, a CUFA-sponsered monograph could be developed detailing research paradigms and instrumentation and commentary relevant to our field.

5. Development of a Monograph on Basic Research. Related to the preceding suggestion, this one calls for a monograph to present different views on what constitutes "basic research" in social studies education.

Conclusion

Let me return to my initial premise. Unless the substantive environmental facts that I inferred as giving rise to and perpetuating our research malaise are addressed and remedied, little significant progress will occur. Criticizing existing research, encouraging communities of interest and publication forums, and recogni-ing outstanding achievements all are hallmarks of a healthy profession. My contention, however, is that they will not suffice.

The suggestions for dealing with the conditions I posit are obviously inadequate, uneven and unoriginal. Our collective preoccupation with the issue, however, should provide more satisfactory solutions.

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